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SUBJECT: ERBIL: KURDISTAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (KDP) POLITBURO  
CHIEF FADHIL MERANI THINKS COMPROMISE SOLUTION ON KIRKUK  
POSSIBLE

Classified By: Regional Coordinator Lucy Tamlyn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

¶1. (C) Summary: In a September 23 courtesy call, KDP Politburo head Fadhlil Merani expressed the view that a political solution could be found to resolve the Article 140 impasse, and stated that in the absence of agreement, a delay was better than resorting to violence. He made a number of observations which indicated that he sees the best hope for the Kurdistan Region's future as part of a unified Iraq. He acknowledged the KDP's influence over the executive and legislative branches and defended the party as a secular, inclusive body. In response to a question on recent attacks on the independent media, Merani claimed there was a conspiracy to blame Kurds for the recent assassination of a journalist in Kirkuk. End summary.

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Kurdistan Region's Future Should Be In A Unified Iraq  
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¶2. (SBU) On September 23, Deputy Team Leader (DTL) and Erbil RRTOff met with Fadhlil Merani, who is the chief of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and his Information Secretary, Amad Mayi, at the KDP office in Sary Rash, Kurdistan. This was a cordial first visit for both DTL and IPAO with Merani, who discussed important issues and recounted the history of Kurdish-American relations. Merani stressed that "democracy in the Kurdish Region cannot survive" without "democracy in Iraq," particularly in the face of pressure from regional neighbors - Iran, Turkey, Syria and Jordan/Egypt - each with its own agenda (respectively Shia dominance, support for Turkomen, resurgent Baathism and Arab nationalism, according to Merani.) He objected to recent statements made by Kurdish National Assembly (KNA) Speaker Adnan Mufti in the press (restated at a 9/11 memorial event hosted by the RRT) concerning the GOI's planned purchase of 36 F-16 fighter planes from the U.S. (Mufti had asked that Washington and Baghdad promise not to use weapons against the Kurds.) Merani supports the arming of GOI forces, and believes it is necessary for strategic regional defense.

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Kirkuk: Perhaps a "Lebanese Solution"  
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¶3. (SBU) On Kirkuk, Merani believes that if the issue cannot be resolved quickly, decision-makers should put the issue aside for two to three years to allow emotions to cool. However, he did state that a decision might be possible in the next couple of weeks and indicated that he would be part of a delegation going to Baghdad to discuss this following the return of President Talabani. A solution would require concessions. One possibility, he said, would be to have

power-sharing like in Lebanon, such as appointments based on ethnicity (e.g., a Kurdish Governor, a Turkoman Deputy Governor, etc.). Another option would be to have a planned rotation of senior level positions, (e.g. this year a Kurd is Governor; at the next opportunity, the slot would go to a Christian governor). He said that an agreement on power-sharing could even be struck before the elections - just so long as elections went forward. He noted that the Kurds had already agreed to a division of administrative positions (something they in fact welcome, he claimed, as Kurds are under-represented in administrative positions in Kirkuk, such as at the Northern Oil Company). On Iraqi elections, he stated his belief that the Dawa party does not want the elections in Iraq to go forward because they received a disproportionate share of influence in the last election due to boycotts.

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Vive le KDP  
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¶ 14. (SBU) On the KDP, Mr. Merani believes that the party is inclusive and that it attracts members from all religions and ethnic groups. He acknowledged without further comment that the party has control over both the executive and legislative branches of the KRG. He worked to refute claims the party is "tribal-based," loyal only to President Barzani or the Barzani clan. Rather, Kurds respect the Barzani name because the Barzanis have been fighting for Kurdish rights since the First World War, he said. He said KDP officials believe other Kurdish political parties, including the PUK, are splintered offshoots of the KDP. Asked to describe which

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political party in Western Europe he identified with, Merani could not identify an analogy. He pointed out that the PUK is associated with Socialist International, but the KDP is "liberal" not "socialist." Asked to give his vision of the KDP 5-10 years from now, Merani had no specific response.

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SFA  
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¶ 15. (SBU) In current negotiations over the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA), Merani believes the agreement is supported by the Kurds and the Communists, but will find opposition among both Sunni and Shia Arabs. He finds this ironic, in that current U.S. policy appears to offer greater support to Arabs. He believes that Iran would like to see a stalled SFA, which would put the U.S. in an awkward international position, and possibly promote an early U.S. withdrawal, and allow greater Iranian influence in Iraq's affairs. He stated Iranian influence has gone all the way to President Maliki's office. He said "we agree at night, but by day, people are getting calls on mobiles" (alluding to Iranian/Turkish pressure in the decision-making process). He stated that President Maliki was purposefully stalling the SFA.

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The Role of the Press  
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¶ 16. (SBU) Merani mused that Iraqi society is still at least a century behind Western thinking in some respects, and that the Iraqi people will need time to evolve. He mentioned his son, and that he is a different generation, with more open ideas. (Note: Merani is a dual U.S./Iraqi national with one adult son living and working in Virginia.) However, he repeatedly stressed interference by regional neighbors as Iraq's most looming problem today.

¶ 17. (SBU) As for allegations about crackdowns on a free press, he warned that journalists "must be careful." They need to be guided more by "nationalism." He stated that

journalists were not always professional, and that it would be better to slowly permit more freedom as journalistic professionalism evolves. He said that some journalists are funded by Turkey and Iran, and that there was a conspiracy to link the Kurds with the assassinations of journalists in Kirkuk.

¶8. (C) Comment: As head of the KDP, Merani wields great influence and is part of the KRG inner-circle of decision-makers, but it is unlikely that his leadership will take the party past its current corporatist structure. His advocacy of negotiation and compromise on larger political issues contrasts with views of some of his harder-line colleagues. Given that we have heard allegations (but not definitive evidence) about possible KDP involvement in the July murder of Livn Magazine's Kirkuk Bureau Chief Soran Hama (reftel), Merani's advice to journalists to "be careful" has an ominous ring. End comment

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